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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 000181

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#) [VT](#)  
SUBJECT: CHALDEAN IRAQI CHURCH CONTINUES TO SUFFER LOSSES

REF: 05 VATICAN 000441

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, CDA, AMEMB VATICAN,  
STATE.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary  
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1. (S) Summary: Monsignor Philip Najim, Representative of the Chaldean Catholic Church to the Holy See and the Chaldeans' European representative, told PolOffs in an August 28 meeting that the Chaldean Church continues to lose many of its faithful due to the deteriorating security situation in Iraq. Regarding the recent kidnapping of Father Hanna of Baghdad, Najim stated that this was most likely the work of criminal elements in Baghdad, not an overt act targeting the Iraqi Christian community. Nevertheless, he said, the psychological effect of the kidnapping on Christians in Iraq was substantial. Najim also mentioned that the Chaldean Patriarch met regularly with the Grand Ayatollah Sistani - this might be an opportunity to develop an alternative communications avenue with Sistani if desired (see paragraph six). End Summary.

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Chaldean Church "Starting to Die"  
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2. (C) Monsignor Philip Najim, Representative of the Chaldean Catholic Church to the Holy See and the Vatican-appointed caretaker for Chaldeans in Europe, said the Chaldean Church in Iraq is "starting to die" and estimated that approximately fifty (50) thousand Church members had departed Iraq permanently for the U.S., Europe, Jordan and Syria since 2003. (Comment: Najim

said that the press reports of higher numbers of Chaldeans leaving Iraq were overstated). Najim continued themes we have heard from him and from his superior, Chaldean Patriarch Emmanuel III Delly, in the past. Najim said the Chaldeans were fleeing Iraq primarily because of what he termed the general lawlessness in the country. He said disorder and violence had become so pervasive that life in Iraq had become intolerable for its citizens, including Church members. Najim also repeated other assertions we had heard previously, that evangelical Christian groups were complicating the inter-religious picture in Iraq by reckless conversion efforts. Najim's main concern was targeted proselytism of Chaldeans, but he also described, as he had in the past, the way in which Western evangelicals had helped to create new discord between Muslims and Iraqi Christians where there had been little in the past.

13. (C) Unfortunately for the future of the Church in Iraq, lamented Najim, Chaldeans do not identify themselves as Iraqis and would not therefore be disposed to return to Iraq in the future when things improve. Najim said Patriarch Delly was the first Patriarch to emphasize the historic ties of all Chaldeans to Iraq; he explained how Delly was imploring all Chaldeans to maintain those bonds and stay in their native land.

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Ransom Demanded for Release of Father Saad Hanna  
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14. (C) Najim said the kidnappers of Father Saad Hanna, the Chaldean priest taken in the Al Dora district of Baghdad on 15 August, had demanded an unspecified cash ransom on 26 August for

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his release. According to Najim, the kidnappers used Hanna's cell phone to contact the Patriarch with their demands which included the threat "to cut Hanna into little pieces and put him in front of your church should you contact the U.S." Najim said there had been no further contact with the kidnappers since their 26 August cell phone call. Najim speculated that the kidnapping may have been spurred on by a recent article in the Christian Science Monitor which provided details of the recent kidnapping and ransoming of Father Raad Washan in early August.

15. (C) Najim said Patriarch Delly had met with both Prime Minister Maliki and President Talabani of Iraq along with the heads of the various Muslim communities in an effort to seek their support and assistance in obtaining Hanna's release. Najim told us in confidence that he was disappointed that Ambassador Yelda, Iraq's Ambassador to the Holy See, had not even called him to express his concern or to offer any assistance. According to Najim, Yelda had done little for the Chaldean community.

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An Ayatollah Sistani Interlocutor?  
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16. (S) In describing Patriarch Delly's efforts to win Hanna's release, Najim informed us that Delly met regularly with the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani to discuss matters of mutual concern

between the two communities. He did not provide any further details of their relationship, but gave us the impression that Delly has reasonable access to Sistani on inter-religious matters. (Comment: Embassy Vatican could approach Najim to determine whether Patriarch Delly would be willing to discuss certain matters of interest to the United States if Department desires.)

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Najim's Name Republished on Shia Hit List  
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17. (C) Najim mentioned offhandedly that his name had once again been published in the Iraqi Shia newspaper Al-Hawza and then on its Internet site for alleged collaboration with the former regime. As described in reftel, Najim denies the accusation and seemed mostly nonplused about the threat to his person. He mentioned that he would not be returning to Iraq in any case as the patriarch had ordered him to stay away in part because of this threat.

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Comment  
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18. (C) Najim's concern for the Chaldean community - and for all Christians in Iraq - has been a constant refrain from him and Patriarch Delly in the many conversations we have had with them. Najim's emphasis here, however, was less on current or potential religious discrimination or anti-Christian violence than on what he described as a chaotic security situation that put all Iraqis at risk.  
SANDROLINI